

Constitution, particularly those who serve in Kentucky at Fort Knox, Fort Campbell, the Blue Grass Army Depot, or as Reservists or members of the National Guard. Without their service and sacrifice, we would not enjoy the liberties enshrined in this historical document.

As Abraham Lincoln once said, ours is a government of the people, by the people, and for the people. The Constitution begins with the very words, "We the people." It ensures that, in America, power is dependent on the consent of the people. And that principle has helped to build a nation that represents the greatest hope for freedom around the world.

TRIBUTE TO MARGARET HOULIHAN SMITH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today I want to congratulate a former member of my Senate staff, Margaret Houlihan Smith. Margaret served as my Chicago director and previously as a senior member of my 1996 campaign team. Since 2004, Margaret has served as director of corporate and government affairs for United Airlines, responsible for advancing its legislative objectives and protecting its commercial interests in Illinois.

Next week, Margaret is receiving the *Rerum Novarum* Award at St. Joseph College Seminary in Chicago. The *Rerum Novarum* Award, or Rights and Duties of Capital and Labor, is named after an encyclical written by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 that addressed issues facing the working class. Specifically, *Rerum Novarum*'s fundamental principles are respect for the dignity of every person and their labor, the right to organize and belong to a union, and the right to a living wage.

Every year, on behalf of St. Joseph College Seminary, the Seminary Salutes Committee honors men and women who have supported these ideals in the Chicagoland area. Well, I want to tell you that the committee couldn't have made a better choice than Margaret Houlihan Smith.

Margaret learned the importance of these values and public service from her father, Dan Houlihan. Known as Dan-the-man to his constituents—he represented the South Side of Chicago—the Beverly neighborhood—in the Illinois House of Representatives. Public service was in Margaret's blood.

So it is no surprise that, after graduating from St. Mary's College in Winona, MN, Margaret started right at the top in Illinois politics and began working for Michael Madigan, Speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives. In 1995, she helped run my first Senate campaign. And in 1996, Margaret agreed to be the director of my Chicago office. Her boundless energy, quick wit, and great judgment made her an outstanding member of my staff and set a high bar for those that followed.

One day, while working in my Chicago office, Margaret lost her voice.

When she tried to talk, she croaked like a frog. Her doctor urged her to stop talking for about a week. But anyone that knows Margaret knows this would be a challenge. You see, Margaret is the definition of an Irish lass: a wonderful sense of humor and, above all, a great storyteller—so great that she never stops telling stories. And let me assure you, her doctor's urgings didn't stop her. But I couldn't be more proud that Margaret is still out there sharing stories and lending her voice to the issues that matter in her community.

Margaret is driven by a willingness to offer a helping hand and is one of the most generous people I have had the pleasure to know. In her spare time, she serves on the boards of Misericordia Heart of Mercy, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, Irish Fellowship of Chicago, the Civic Federation, and the Chicagoland Chamber of Commerce PAC Board. If that wasn't enough, Margaret is also a founding member of the Illinois Women's Institute for Leadership.

She is an extraordinarily accomplished professional, but it is her caring heart that makes Margaret such a deserving recipient of this award. For more than a decade, Margaret has served on the Seminary Salutes Committee, tirelessly advocating for the St. Joseph College Seminary. Year after year, she works to raise money and vocation awareness in Chicagoland. And because of her efforts, the Seminary Salutes annual fundraising event, which benefits the scholarship program for low-income students, continues to be a success. I am honored to congratulate her on all the work she has done for St. Joseph College Seminary.

Despite her many achievements, her proudest accomplishment is her family. Never forgetting where she comes from—a trait her father and his beloved wife of 50 years, Mary Alice Houlihan, instilled in her—Margaret lives in the Beverly neighborhood of Chicago with her husband, Jim, and their two children: 8-year-old son Jack and 6-year-old daughter Maeve.

Let me close with this: Margaret's father used to have a favorite saying—"He has a big hat size." It was Dan's way to describe someone who was full of themselves. Well, Margaret has never forgotten those words and always stayed humble. I couldn't be more proud of the work she has done and the person she has become. And although her father is no longer with us, I know he feels the same way.

Congratulations, Margaret, on a well-deserved honor.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, for 2 years, President Obama's five eminently qualified nominees to the U.S. Court of Federal Claims have been awaiting a vote. This court has been referred to as the "keeper of the na-

tion's conscience" and "the People's Court." It was created by Congress approximately 160 years ago and embodies the constitutional principle that individuals have rights against their government. As President Lincoln said, "It is as much the duty of Government to render prompt justice against itself, in favor of citizens, as it is to administer the same between private individuals." That is what this Court does: it allows citizens to seek prompt justice against our government.

Yet 2 years of obstruction by a single Senator, the junior Senator from Arkansas, has forced the court to operate without one-third of its allotted judges. While these five nominees have been waiting for a vote, another judge retired, leaving the court with only 10 judges for 16 seats, or a vacancy rate of 38 percent. This takes Senate Republican obstruction of judicial nominees to a new level.

The court's jurisdiction is authorized by statute, and it primarily hears monetary claims against the U.S. Government deriving from the Constitution, Federal statutes, executive regulations, and civilian or military contracts. For example, the court has presided over such important cases as the savings and loan crisis of the 1980s and the World War II internment of Japanese-Americans. It also presides over civilian and military pay claims and money claims under the Fifth Amendment's Takings Clause.

I have heard no objections to the qualifications of any of the five nominees to this court. One of these nominees, Armando Bonilla, would be the first Hispanic judge to hold a seat on the Court. He is endorsed by the Hispanic National Bar Association. He has spent his entire career—now spanning over two decades—as an attorney for the Department of Justice. He was hired out of law school in the Department's prestigious honors program and has risen to become the Associate Deputy Attorney General in the Department. Mr. Bonilla should be confirmed without further delay.

Another nominee, Jeri Somers, also has a long record of public service. She served her country in the Air Force, retiring with the rank of lieutenant colonel. She spent over two decades serving first as a judge advocate general and then as a military judge in the U.S. Air Force and the District of Columbia's Air National Guard. In 2007, she became a board judge with the U.S. Civilian Board of Contract Appeals and currently serves as its vice chair.

Armando Bonilla and Jeri Somers are just two of the five nominees that Senate Republicans have been denying a confirmation vote. These are two individuals that have done right every step of the way in their careers and are willing to serve the American people on this important Court. They have dedicated the majority of their careers in service to our Nation. They deserve better than the treatment they are receiving from the Senate.